

The Queen's Platinum Jubilee
St James Church Alderholt Sunday 6th February 2022

Introduction:

Today, being 6th February, is also Accession Day when the anniversary of the reigning monarch taking the throne is commemorated. It's particularly appropriate to celebrate this anniversary in 2022 as it marks the beginning of The Queen's Platinum Jubilee and I'll be talking more about that in my sermon. I hope it will be quite clear from the content why I chose this Gospel reading for today.

The Gospel Reading:

A Dispute about Greatness – Luke 22.24-30

²⁴ A dispute also arose among them as to which one of them was to be regarded as the greatest. ²⁵ But he said to them, 'The kings of the Gentiles lord it over them; and those in authority over them are called benefactors. ²⁶ But not so with you; rather the greatest among you must become like the youngest, and the leader like one who serves. ²⁷ For who is greater, the one who is at the table or the one who serves? Is it not the one at the table? But I am among you as one who serves.

²⁸ 'You are those who have stood by me in my trials; ²⁹ and I confer on you, just as my Father has conferred on me, a kingdom, ³⁰ so that you may eat and drink at my table in my kingdom, and you will sit on thrones judging the twelve tribes of Israel.

Sermon:

I'm sure you don't need me to remind you that later this year, in the first week of June, we will be celebrating the Queen's platinum jubilee. But if you are up on your knowledge of recent royal history you will know that Princess Elizabeth was crowned Queen in June 1953. So, why are we celebrating the Queen's 70 years of monarchy in June 2022?

Some, if not all of you could answer that question, but let me remind you anyway. Princess Elizabeth acceded to the throne on the death of her father, King George VI, on 6th February 1952, and that is exactly 70 years ago – today. A period of mourning for the passing of the king followed before the extensive planning and preparation for the coronation in June 1953. During the period between February 1952 and June 1953, Elizabeth ruled as Princess Regent.

OK, that accounts for the apparent discrepancy of one year, but how much do you know about the celebrations in June this year? There doesn't seem to be much detailed information available right now, but if you think it will all be military parades, pop concerts and street parties, think again. Yes, these things will take place and I'm sure they will be quite spectacular, but as with her diamond jubilee 10 years ago, there will also be a serious, reflective side to the occasion with many church services at National and local level, to give thanks to God for the Queen's long reign.

The Queen is a sincerely religious person, and not just because she is also supreme governor of the Church of England. She would be very much aware of our Gospel passage today in which Jesus told his disciples, "The greatest among you must become like the youngest, and the leader like one who serves".

From day one of her reign, the Queen has invoked the deeply biblical notion of the servant monarch. In her diamond jubilee that theme of service came through strongly in the sermon delivered by the Archbishop of Canterbury, Dr Rowan Williams. His words were interpreted as a tribute to a monarch whose ethos of sacrifice stands in stark contrast to a more selfish modern age.

This is an extract from the coronation oath taken by Her Majesty:

The Archbishop asked:

"Madam, is your Majesty willing to take the oath?"

Elizabeth replied:

"I am willing."

The Archbishop asked:

"Will you solemnly promise and swear to govern the peoples of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland, Canada, Australia, New Zealand, the Union of South Africa, Pakistan and Ceylon according to their respective laws and custom?"

Elizabeth replied:

"I solemnly promise so to do".

The Archbishop then held up a Bible; Her Majesty knelt, placed her right hand on the Bible and made this solemn promise:

"The things which I have here before promised I will perform and keep, so help me God."

The Lord Great Chamberlain then presented a parchment copy of the oath; still kneeling, Her Majesty signed the oath. This is the only time that she has made a written contract with her people.

This is an extract from the sermon given by Archbishop Rowan Williams in 2012 to mark the Diamond Jubilee of Her Majesty the Queen.

"There will be other occasions to remember the splendour and the drama of the coronation. Today's focus is different: what we remember is the simple statement of commitment made by a very young woman away from home, suddenly and devastatingly bereaved, a statement that she would be there for those she governed, that she was dedicating herself to them.

To declare a lifelong dedication is to take a huge risk, but it is also to respond to the promise of a vision that brings joy, and perhaps that's the challenge that this jubilee sets before us in nation and Commonwealth. St Paul implies that we should be so overwhelmed by the promise of a shared joy far greater than narrow individual fulfilment that we find the strength to take the risks and make the sacrifices. Even if this seems to reduce our individual hopes of secure enjoyment.

Moralists, archbishops included, can thunder away as much as they like of course but they'll make no difference until people see that there is something transforming and exhilarating about the prospect of a whole community rejoicing together, being

glad of each other's happiness and safety. This alone is what will save us from the traps of ludicrous financial greed, of environmental recklessness, of collective fear of strangers and collective contempt for the unsuccessful and marginal and many more things that we see far too much of around and within us. One crucial aspect of discovering such a vision is to have the stories and examples available that show it's possible.

Thank God there are many wonderful instances lived out unobtrusively throughout the country and the Commonwealth. But we are marking today the anniversary of one historic and very public act of dedication; a dedication that has endured faithfully, calmly and generously through most of the adult lives of most of us here. Six decades of living proof that public service is possible. And that it is a place where happiness can be found. To seek one's own good and one's own wellbeing in the health of the community is sacrificially hard work but it is this search that is truly natural to the human heart. May we be given the grace to rediscover this as we give thanks today for Her Majesty's 60 years of utterly demanding yet deeply joyful service."

That sermon from the Archbishop was very good and appropriate for the occasion, but you may be surprised to hear that there was some controversy within the national media over what he said, particularly regarding the reference to 'a more selfish modern age'.

It is very clear to us all that the queen has never succumbed to the temptations of 'a more selfish modern age'. In her 21st birthday radio broadcast in 1947, Princess Elizabeth declared: "My whole life, whether it be long or short, shall be devoted to your service" Unlike her uncle, who abdicated as King Edward VIII in 1936 to marry Wallis Simpson, the Queen has always seen her role as not just a full-time job; it is her whole life and she will do it until the absolute end.

10 years on from that diamond jubilee the archbishop's address has never been more relevant; but our unchanging queen continues to uphold that pledge she made on her 21st birthday "My whole life, whether it be long or short, shall be devoted to your service". Only God knows how many more years the Queen will continue as our monarch, but one thing is certain – she will remain our queen until she takes her last breath.

Let us pray for Elizabeth our Queen and Governor:

O God, who providest for thy people by thy power, and rulest over them in love: Vouchsafe so to bless thy Servant our Queen, that under her this nation may be wisely governed, and thy Church may serve thee in all godly quietness; and grant that she being devoted to thee with her whole heart, and persevering in good works unto the end, may, by thy guidance, come to thine everlasting kingdom; through Jesus Christ thy Son our Lord, who liveth and reigneth with thee and the Holy Ghost, ever one God, world without end. Amen.

Rev David Dennis